

People's Participation in Democracy through Ethnic Grass Root Institutions

Moti Deogam

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

India has adopted a federal government system with unitary bias due to which there is distribution of power but united in nature to the center. The beauty of democracy is the representation of every individual of a country by empowering them through people's participation in the Indian democratic system. India has avoided the straight jacket structure of the western democratic political system by introducing three layers of government in which local level institutions facilitate people's participation. Panchayati Raj institutions as grass root institutions are more encouraged by, self-help groups, community groups and local set of ethnic institutions which are based on the ancient social beliefs, culture and customary practices.

This paper would discuss the people's participation of Ho's indigenous community in the state of Jharkhand, India who are practicing it through their traditional, cultural, social and political institution that is Munda-Manki institution. Later the method of participation, and problems in maintaining this institution will be discussed, thereafter followed with findings and solutions. It will show how it is contributing to the acceleration of people's participation at the grass root level to strengthen Indian democracy.

KEYWORDS: *people's participation, tenth five-year plan, federal system, Panchayati raj institutions, Munda-Manki institutions, customary laws*

METHODOLOGY

The paper is descriptive in nature. Primary data has been taken from the survey which was collected from the month of January to June in the year of 2022 in three villages that are Simbiya, Tekrahatu, Lupungguttu of west Singhbhum district of Jharkhand state. Thereafter observation method is also applied and secondary data has been collected from books and articles.

Introduction

Indigenous population found in every country in the world have their own way of living life that is unique and varies according to their specific territories, culture, customs and beliefs. All over the world indigenous communities are being recognized by the modern nation states government.

Different political institutions in different countries in the world are based on the ancient traditional societal institutions and gradual changes in these institution became as the part of modern nation state or resulted

How to cite this paper: Moti Deogam "People's Participation in Democracy through Ethnic Grass Root Institutions"

Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-7 | Issue-3, June 2023, pp.523-527,

URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd57407.pdf



IJTSRD57407

Copyright © 2023 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



in democratic institutions. Crook states that traditional cultural institutes are not the part of the museum but instead these are living cultural and political institution which is still could be seen in different countries.¹ Some countries have taken indigenous traditional institution very seriously by knowing the heritage values. United states of America have recognized 573 indigenous traditional institutions.²

The main pillar of Democracy is its citizens. According to the United Nation Development Program (UNDIP) (1993:21) "Participation means people are closely involved in economic, social, cultural and political process that affect their lives."³ The Indian government empowers every citizen in people's political participation. It is a challenge for the government to assure people's participation for those who are living in the edge of the society where it is a bit difficult to reach out.

Grass root level institution has come into existence through 73rd constitution amendment act by Indian Constitution in Part IX in 1992. It is important to keep in mind that these Panchayati Raj institution are the modern form of self-governance. On the other hand, indigenous communities have run their self-governance institutions since ages through their customary laws. Matthew states that grass root institutions has neither emerged in the new era nor the adaptation of western political democratic institution but these are already practiced by the Indian communities.⁴

The Government of India has acknowledged every society and their way of social, cultural, ancient way of governing system in their territory to assure every individual's participation in Indian Democracy. Every ethnic society has a distinguished quality of polarizing power through political exclusion that are based on their customary laws. Therefore, it is necessary to motivate these communities to participate in the grass root level government executions. These ethnic groups have been kept under the scheduled list and termed as scheduled tribes by the Indian constitution in the article 366 (25) and defined as "such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be scheduled tribes for the purposes of this constitution". All scheduled tribes of India are unanimously known as Adivasi in common language. India holds the second largest place in terms of tribal population after Africa. Tribes are the children of nature and their lifestyle⁵ is conditioned by the Eco-system.

These Grass root level institutions encourages people's participation. Decentralization of political structure could directly provide a path to the direct participation of people that are based on local beliefs and customs.

In order to empower indigenous communities' Indian government came up with Panchayati Raj institutions. People's participation is possible through Panchayati Raj institutions at the grass root level but regions that fall under fifth and sixth schedule areas have different kinds of needs therefore these regions have decentralization of power through ethnic political institutions. Various acts like PESA Act 1996, (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area) introduced by the Indian government for encouraging indigenous communities to participate in Indian democracy. PESA has given the official authorization of indigenous institutions after the fifth scheduled area provision which was included in the Indian constitution. Democratic participation of people gets immunity through indigenous institutions that are

completely different from any modern –state political procedures' for people's participation.

Tenth five-year plan 2002-2007 has emphasized on people's participation that performs key role in the success of public policy. Through five-year plan, the government initiated to form SHG (self-help groups), in order to improve economic conditions of scheduled castes and indigenous communities at the grass root level to bridge the gap between literacy, health issues for the better participation of people. These SHG have played a vital role in the acceleration of people's participation because marginalized groups have become more self-sufficient through this and it has improved faith in the Indian government.

Ho tribe

Jharkhand secures sixth position in terms of Scheduled Tribe(ST)⁶ population among the states of India. Ho tribe is one of the major tribes in the state of Jharkhand which also resides in other states like Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh of India. West Singhbhum district falls under the southern part of the state of Jharkhand. The place is known as the land of Hos because of the dominance of the ethnic dense population. East Singhbhum, Saraikela-Kharsawan, and Ranchi are the other districts of the state of Jharkhand where a large population of the Ho tribe resides. The total population of Hos in all states of India is 1,139,000⁷ Hos belong to Proto-Australoid racial stock and speaks Ho language of Munda, Austro-Asiatic language family and uses Warangchiti script for writing that was being coded by Guru Kol Lako Bodra in 1950. 'Singbonga' is the supreme deity of the Ho community.

The Ho tribe is known for their special autonomic system of people's participation through the indigenous institution known as Munda-Manki system. The Ho tribe has fought with British rule to maintain their ancient, traditional, social and cultural institution. Munda-Manki is the cultural, social and political institution of Ho indigenous community through which they practice social, cultural, village administration, land disputes, civil disputes etc. In the present time Munda-Manki institution is performing well in their regions under the provision of fifth schedule area but there are struggles of doing this.

Munda-Manki institution

There are three main positions in the Munda-Manki institution: the village Munda who is the head of Ho village, 'Dakuaa' (helper of the Ho Village Munda) and 'Diuri' (cultural priest of the Ho village). All three persons discharge their duties with the help of villagers; actually these position holders are dependent on villagers to carry out village functions.

Apart from these 'Manki' is the post of a person who is the head of fifteen to twenty villages that is similar to council level officers. In the modern times this traditional institution is under threat due to many reasons like establishing municipalities in scheduled areas that violate the Indian constitution. Industries, lack of awareness towards indigenous institutions, implementation issues of policy etc.

Village Munda

Every Ho village is based on 'Killi' (surname or totem) the person from the village founder family inherits the post of village Munda who is responsible to look after village matters. The position of Munda could be transferred to other person, apart from village founding family in the case of not suitable for the post such as sudden death of village Munda, suffering from any diseases due to that not able to perform his duties. The Ho village Munda represents his village to the modern state government. In the other word the researcher states that the Ho community's village Munda could be changed according to the circumstances where the Ho villagers participate directly in the recruitment process.

Ho village Munda is not the ruler but an accountable person who tries to combine all people through societal, cultural practices. If any road has to be constructed or a pond needs to be dug out that is being done by collective labour offerings by the villagers are examples of executive affairs. For all the duties discharged by the village Munda does not demand any salary or any other thing but the villagers offer to help him in his land cultivation. This is the true example of participation in maintaining brotherhood which also accelerates people's participation in democracy at the grass root level. Earlier Ho villagers used to give salami to the village Munda during festivals as per their wish that was not mandatory but out of love. In the present times revenue tax has been collected by the village Munda and he is supposed to issue money receipt to the villagers and deposit to the revenue thana (usually revenue thana are being established in village blocks) of the village. Other villagers complain that they have to rush to block to pay tax that is not comfortable for them as it is difficult to approach officials and illiteracy is another problem over there.

If any quarrel of family, marriages, animal or land disputes take place among villagers, matters would be fixed by customary law (rules based on ancient community practice). Which shows that fixing issues based on communal practices that represents every individual of the society also gives opportunity to participate directly in judiciary matters. Villagers still solve their issues through the Munda-Manki system

rather than approaching police stations. There are some evidences like four villages of Garasai, Fulkam, Supurguttu, Bhobhadiha of Angarpada, panchayat of Manjhgawon block of west Singhbhum, state of Jharkhand has not filed a single case in any police station or court in the last hundred years.⁸ This evidence shows how the Ho tribal community are managing their daily affairs very well through the ancient traditional institution whereas it is difficult to get speedy solutions through the court as it may take decades to solve the case. Village Munda Suleman Hembrom says he takes every decision according to the customary laws which had been made by ancestors. It is important to note that customary laws have been made by the village tribal members that have legal consent of the Ho community. Police station in charge Vikas Dube also states that not a single case has been registered in this police station from all four villages of Garasai, Fulkam, Supurguttu, Bhobhadih villages of Manjhgawon block till the date.⁹ It is important to note that Ho villagers do not want any interference of any outsiders until villagers are not satisfied with the decision of Village Munda.

It is also important to understand that Ho village Munda does not take any decision by his own but through consultancies of the villagers and it is mandatory to present all villagers at the time of resolving any issue. At the time of forming customary laws and values every individual of the Ho community gives their own consent thereafter it comes into existence here again Ho tribal community gets opportunity to participate directly in the legislative activities. The involvement of the Ho tribal community in all the daily life affairs shows the knitted people's participation through Munda-Manki institution that is very much democratic. In the modern times Ho village Munda does not possess many indigenous rights that have been curtailed by the government. In fact, Ho village Munda has become the instrument of the government where government officials do not approach villagers directly for the needed welfare schemes. The resident of Luppunguttu village Rajshree says that they had gathered in the main town of Chaibasa protesting against the formation of a municipality in Sadar Chaibasa. As establishing Municipality is unconstitutional in the fifth scheduled area. Later the state government forcefully imposed a municipality in Sadar Chaibasa that was again a step towards losing faith in the state government. Imposition of municipalities is a threat for indigenous institutions which is an attempt to assimilate Ho's culture with modern state culture. Due to this there are possibilities of lesser participation.

‘Diuri’

He is a religious priest or mediator who mediates between the villagers and nature. All naturalistic rituals are performed by him during nature festivals. He also performs rituals at the times of weddings, and death. Sometimes one ‘Diuri’ holds this post in more than one village. During the worship in ‘Desaouli’ (natural worship place of Ho tribe surrounded by saal trees) every individual has to be present over there, which is mandatory. Today the role of ‘Diuri’ is wrongly connected with other groups; this phenomenon has led to the decline of indigenous rituals.

‘Dakuaa’

He is a helper of Ho village Munda. On the occasion of festivals or meetings, the announcements are made by ‘Dakuaa’ with the beating of drums in the village ‘Akhara’ (a flat ground or under the group of tree that is situated in the middle of the village). In Village like Simbiya, many villagers were ill-informed or could not develop faith in getting vaccinated so they decided not to get vaccinated because maximum Ho villagers use Ho language as their means of communication. It is not easy for the government employees to have direct communication with Ho villagers. But this was the time when the Ho tribe's Munda-Manki institution accomplished the task of vaccinating their villagers by developing a sense of faith.

It is obvious that these villagers could not develop faith until the full information comes to them through reliable sources. Government health department also approached the traditional head of the Ho villages through block level initiatives and provided necessary information and tools to accomplish the Covid 19's solutions to every single person at the grass root level.

During Covid 19 pandemic ‘Dakuaa’ of different Ho villages actively spread awareness regarding the issue and also the ways of getting vaccination. It was difficult to create awareness in the villages because many villagers do not own electronic medium of communication. So ‘Dakuaa’ bridged the gap of communication by getting instruction by Ho village Munda.

Manki

He is the head of the Ho village council where a group of villages falls under his supervision. Actually this post has very few responsibilities because maximum responsibilities are discharged by villagers and village Munda itself. It is very rare that Manki gets to perform. If any case remains unsolved or both parties do not want to compromise, in that case the village Munda calls Manki. At the time of deciding the dates of festivals all Mankis and village Mundas

come together under one roof to make a decision because the same festival is celebrated on different dates in different villages so that no villager could miss out to meet their loved ones while paying visit to different villages during festivals. Ho tribal community gives importance to every individual of the community that shows the unanimous nature of the people's participation in every small to big activities and decision making process.

India has faced a severe pandemic in the two consecutive year that affected every person, society, industry, production in every sense and this posed a question in front of all the units of the Indian government. Question of recovery from Covid 19's damage, anticipatory preparedness to tackle with prone pandemic issues on time through the help of people in collaboration with government agencies. Indian citizens have witnessed extended helping hand by common people where self-volunteers came forward to reach out to people for every kind of assistance. This assistance accelerated in people's participation in grass root level that is again strengthens Indian democracy.

This pandemic has reminded us that ancient communities extended their hands within the community that helped them to become self-sufficient in every situation. During the pandemic of Covid 19 tribal communities were least affected due to their practices as earlier Ho villages used to be abandoned by the community until the diseases completely finished thereafter returning from forest was practised. So village Munda also played an important role during the pandemic by providing a place to stay separately to corona affected people in the villages. This whole situation shows the people's participation in the grass root level where it is not very easy to reach out to every individual. Thus one could say that acceleration of people's participation is possible through grass-root institutions. There was a ban on village Haat (village market) by the government that aroused anger among Ho villagers because some people's livelihood depends on these village haats. Due to the ban on Haat it was difficult to meet their daily needs. It was a decision that lost faith in the government. But it is necessary to see that Manki are being put under pressure to accomplish land alienation or acquisition such as the ‘Icha’ dam project. Ho villagers are continuously protesting against land acquisition. This again becomes the point of losing faith in this institution.

Findings

Through observation and interview it depicts that the Ho tribe still have faith in their traditional, social, cultural and political institution of Munda-Manki

system. But there is a lack of integration between government units and Hos traditional institution because of that Ho villages could not reach out to modern nation states of political units. There are also communication barriers which have widened the gap between the government institutions.

Recommendations

People's participation could be accelerated in grass root democracy especially in Ho villages through developing better communication by government employees. In order to solve this issue there should be necessary recruitment of Ho language speaking persons in concerned government institutions. There should be clarity on land acquisition policy in which government provisions should be followed by the concerning department. Children should be taught about indigenous institutions and their languages in the specific territories. Traditional culture need to be encouraged and try to avoid the assimilation of culture and way of living in order to preserve heritage value along with maximum opportunity for people's participation.

Reference

[1] Crook, R. (2005). *The role of traditional institutions in political change and development*, CDD/ODI Policy Brief No. 4. Retrieved on 02 September 2022 from, <https://www.odi.org/resources>

- [2] *Tribal Nations & the United Nations: An introduction*. Retrieved on 04 September 2022 from, www.ncal.org/abouttribes
- [3] <https://www.sociologyguide.com> retrieved on 09 September 2022
- [4] C. Mathew.C "*Grass Roots level democracy in India*" Yojana, Feb-2011
- [5] <https://tribal.nic.in>
- [6] The Article 366 (25) of Constitution of India defines scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution".
- [7] http://joshuaproject.net/people_group/16944/In retrieved on 04 September 2022
- [8] "Paschimi Singhbhum ke chaar gaon se shaw warsh me ek bhi case thana nahi gaya, vivad ka munda karte hai faisala" Dainik Bhaskar, Chaibasa, west Singhbhum, Jharkhand 17 September 2021
- [9] Ibid.